A TURNING POINT IN T. S. ELIOT'S POETRY

A Study on *Ash Wednesday*

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INTRODUCTION

T. S. Eliot, the great critic and poet of the twentieth century, presents us with a vast range of various problems, each of which is worth discussing in full detail. In sutdying this poet, I often found myself quite lost among the confusing problems. After many trials I found that it would be best to limit the problem and concentrate on some small matter. It is by this consideration that I chose a short poem *Ash Wednesday* as the subject of my study.

Through his career as a poet which began as early as 1917, T. S. Eliot has published a great number of poems which made him one of the representative poets of the twentieth century; and these poems, as Matthiessen says, can be understood better by reading them connectedly.[1] It is because his poetry has a strong integrity; this integrity is impressed more powerfully when we look at the series of his poems as

[1] Matthiessen, F. O., *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 97.

one whole. Integrity means, here, that the series of his poems shows a development or a continuity. Helen Gardner, one of the most authoritative critics of T. S. Eliot, described this development as the progress from "boredom" to "horror" and finally to "glory".[1] Eliot himself used these three words in his essay on Matthew Arnold:

> . . . the essential advantage for a poet is not, to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the *boredom*, and the *horror*, and the *glory*.[2]

This short passage reveals one of the greatest characteristics of Eliot's poetry, and shows the moral attitude towards life. Also, the passage from his essay on Baudelaire,

> So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least we exist.[3]

shows us that his understanding of humanity is moralistic—dealing with "good" and "evil" not "beauty" and "ugliness". I think we can trace the New England tradition of the puritan mind in this attitude of Eliot.

Now, *Ash Wednesday* stands in the middle of the whole series of Eliot's poems. It draws our attention with its delicate beauty together with much technical interest,[4] in its imagery, literary allusions, and especially in its rhythm and music.

However, when we place this poem in the series of the poems and reflect on it as one stage of the development, another problem arises. Especially when we think about the fact that this poem is preceded by *The Hollow Men*, the poem of gloomy despair. Comparing *Ash Wednes-*

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[1] Gardner, Helen, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, London, Cresset Press, 1949, p. 79.

[2] Eliot, T. S., *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, London, Faber & Faber Ltd., 1933, p. 106.

[3] Eliot, T. S., "Baudelaire", *Selected Prose*, John Hayward, ed., Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1955, p. 194.

[4] Leavis, F. R., *New Bearings in English Poetry*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1950, pp. 117–8. Leavis says that *Ash Wednesday* "is a most subtle poetry of great technical interest; and it is on the technical aspect that critical attention must in any case focus."

day with other earlier poems, we will surely come to think that this poem is, in a way, a turning point in the poet's development. What kind of turning is it, from where to where? Why does it come to take place? Following it, there is one more question: what is the effect of this turning on the technique of poetry? These are the main problems of my study.

In discussing the poet's development and the turning in it, we must first know what the poem is like. So the first chapter will be devoted to the discussion on the poem itself. In the second chapter, I will treat two problems. First, in tracing briefly the development of his poetry, I am going to discuss the process and necessity of the change in Eliot's poetry. Secondly, the effect of the change on the technique of poetry will be discussed. The method of the earlier poems and that of *Ash Wednesday* will be contrasted in the discussion. In short, the second chapter treats *Ash Wednesday* as a turning point.

Chapter I *Ash Wednesday* as a Poem

I will begin this study with a brief discussion on the circumstance in which *Ash Wednesday* was composed. It was first published in its present form of a series of six poems in 1930. Some of the six poems, however, had already appeared in some magazines before. The second poem appeared in 1927 under the title of "Salutation"; the first one, in 1928 as "*Perch' Io Non Spero*"; and the third one, in 1929 as "*Som de l' Escalina*". Thus, it took four years to compose this short poem.

These four years are included in the middle period in Eliot's poetry during which so called transitional poems, such as *Ariel* poems, were composed. Nineteen-twenty-seven is an eventful and important year for Eliot. For it was in this year that Eliot was both converted to the Anglo-Catholic faith and became naturalized as an Englishman. This great change in his personal life must account for the main cause of the change in his poetry. For though "poetry is not the expression of personality"[1] it is, after all, something that is produced by a poet. It

[1] Eliot, T. S., *The Sacred Wood*, 7th ed., London, Methuen & Co., 1957, p. 58.

is quite natural, when such great events as conversion of a mature person and expatriating himself occur together, that his art is affected by them. He cannot but express his own experience in his poetry, and therefore these transitional poems " are to be found perhaps the most human of Eliot's poems."[1]

As Fraser says, *Ash Wednesday* treats as its subject the rebirth of faith or conversion:

> . . . *Ash Wednesday*, a very beautiful but also a very difficult poem, can be thought at least partly as a record of that slow and painful purification of the inner self in Mr. Eliot's own case.[2]

Moreover, it seems as if " the speaker is not wholly willing to share his secret, perhaps because it is still in part a secret from himself."[3] Thus, it cannot be helped that this poem is rather ambiguous.

That this poem has no close and rigorous unity is natural, since each of the first three pieces was published separately. Eliot might be thinking of making the *Ash Wednesday* series as early as 1927 when he composed the second section of it, but we have no means to certify that. Therefore " it is probably a mistake to attempt to trace a development of the theme from poem to poem ".[4] However, when we read through this series of poems, we never fail to be impressed by some unifying power; although we notice, at the same time, its disjointedness. In fact, it is clear that in the fourth, fifth and sixth poems the poet is conscious of the whole of this poem; and also that he has some unity in view. What, then, is this unity? The most obvious unifying element is the temporal focus. All six poems have something to do with the ritual of Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent in the Catholic Church. On this day, the priest, making the sign of the cross with his thumb dipped in ashes on the forehead of the adherent, tones:

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[1] Stephenson, E. M., *T. S. Eliot and the Lay Reader*, 2nd ed., London, The Fortune Press, 1946, p. 46.

[2] Fraser, G. S., *The Modern Writer and His World*, London, William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1953, p. 208.

[3] Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

" Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return." It is the day of repentance, the day of weeping, fasting and prayer. The atmosphere of this poem is that of Ash Wednesday, and the whole of it may be regarded as a prayer offered on this day of repentance.

The exceedingly rhythmical verse in *Ash Wednesday* is perhaps affected by the rhythmical use of words in incantation, which is now widely accepted as the origin of poetry. In one of his essays Eliot says that the music of poetry cannot exist apart from the meaning.[1] Conversely, the meaning of poetry is not something which exists apart from the music or rhythm; and this is especially true with *Ash Wednesday*. It is, I think, impossible to discuss the meaning or substance of *Ash Wednesday* if we disregard its verse form. Therefore I will next discuss the style of this poem in detail, comparing it with that of *The Waste Land*.

The main characteristics of the rhythm of *Ash Wednesday* are the slowness in movement and smoothness in transition. Instead of economy in words, the result of which is the compact, and condensed lines with fixed precision, there are repetitive lines of vague, and suggestive, and incantatory effect.[2] Let me quote the opening lines of *The Waste Land* and those of *Ash Wednesday* to make clear the contrast between them.

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
(" The Burial of the Dead ", ll. 1–4)

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things
(Why should the agèd eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?
(I, ll. 1–8)

The lines from *The Waste Land* are just as compact and concise as those

[1] Eliot, T. S., " The Music of Poetry ", *Selected Prose*, p. 56.
[2] Gardner, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–2.

from *Ash Wednesday* are lyrical and flowing. Helen Gardner called *Ash Wednesday* the poem which is shortened by paraphrase,[1] and her comment applies perfectly well to the lines quoted above. The first line "Because I do not hope to turn again," is almost a word-for-word translation from a poem of Guido Cavalcanti. Cavalcanti, an Italian poet of the twelfth century and the best friend of Dante, wrote this poem when he was dying in exile, recalling his "Lady" in his home-town. In this poem "his worship of the Lady is the only positive feeling, all else being exhaustion and despair,"[2] and this explains the mood of the poem, *Ash Wednesday* in a symbolical way. This sentence pattern (Because I . . .) is repeated for eleven times in the first poem and each of the five stanzas which construct the main part of the poem has at least one sentence of this pattern. The repetition is especially noticeable in the first and the second stanzas; it signifies the speaker's hesitation to make a decision, at the same time his effort to concentrate upon the problem of "renunciation". Besides this, several other repetitions of words draw our attention. The following lines are some examples of it:

> I no longer strive to strive towards such things . . .
> (1. 5)
>
> Because I know that time is always time
> And place is always and only place
> And what is actual is actual only for one time
> And only for one place . . .
> (ll. 16–9)
>
> Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
> But merely vans to beat the air
> The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
> Smaller and dryer than the will
> Teach us to care and not to care
> Teach us to sit still.
> (ll. 34–9)

These repetitions and the occasional rhymes, which are put so

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

[2] Jones, E. E. Duncan, "*Ash Weduesday*", *T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writing by Several Hands*, B. Rajan, ed., London, Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1947, p. 39.

ingeniously as to be read almost unconsciously, serve to give a mesmeric effect. They deprive the reader of his intellectual power of analysis and criticism, and bring him into a certain state of mind. The speaker's state of mind in Section I is " the hopelessness of the return to joys of sense and the hopelessness of the return to God."[1] This feeling of hopelessness, doubt, and despair is intensified by the wavering progress of lines with very little punctuation. The inserted line, " Why should the agèd eagle stretch its wings? " also illustrates this languid feeling of doubt very well. The eagle is often used as the symbol of youthful strength in Scripture.[2] But " the aged eagle " is from a medieval lore, and it symbolizes the renewal of youthfulness after destruction by fire.[3] However, the aged eagle here, does not or cannot stretch its wings,

> Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
> But merely vans to beat the air . . .
>
> (ll. 34–5)

The last two lines of Section I are the words from "*Ave Maria* ". These lines signify that the protagonist " is already at the hour of his death, in the sense that separation and exile, the hopelessness of turning, have ended a way of life."[4]

Then the poem goes on to Section II in which the protagonist constructs " something upon which to rejoice ".[5] But before going to the second poem, I want to point out one more characteristic of *Ash Wednesday*. It is that this poem is the monologue of a protagonist, who speaks, offers prayer and tells us of his dreams and visions. *Ash Wednesday* is a lyrical poem. In a sense *The Hollow Men* is also one. Whereas until *The Waste Land* almost all of Eliot's poems are called " dramatic ".[6] In

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[1] Smith, Grover, Jr., *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1956, p. 139.

[2] Cf. Psalm, 103:5, or Isaiah, 40:31.

[3] Drew, E., *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry*, London, Eyre and Spotuiswoode, 1950, p. 131.

[4] Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[5] *Ash Wednesday*, I, ll. 24–5.

[6] Wilson, Frank, *Six Essays on the Development of T. S. Eliot*, London, The Fortune Press, 1948, p. 112, also cf. Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

" The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock " and other earlier poems, this inclination is shown through the conversational style which is thought to be the effect of French symbolists, especially of Corbière and Laforgue.[1] But here I will quote another passage from *The Waste Land.*

> Summer surprised us, coming over the Stambergersee
> With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
> And went on in sunshine, into the Hofgarten,
> And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
> Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
> And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
> My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
> And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
> Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
> In the mountains, there you feel free.
> I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.
>
> (" The Burial of the Dead ", ll. 8–18)

This passage comes after the famous opening of this poem which I quoted before. On this passage, together with the preceding seven lines, Lawrence Durrel presents an interesting discussion in his book on modern poetry. He analyses these lines into the speeches of several persons, and also puts the appointments for sound effect and music.[2] Thus he shows what dramatic effect these lines have. Or, in his words, he shows how the technique of *The Waste Land* is akin to the technique of the movie.[3]

" Part II of *Ash Wednesday* celebrates the theme of joy in the acceptance of death."[4] It is the vision of whiteness full of allusions to Dante and Scripture. The canceled title and epigraph " Salutation: The Hand of the Lord Was Upon Me :—*e vo significando* " have come from *The New Life*,[5] Scripture,[6] and *The Divine Comedy*.[7] This fact is very significant;

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

[2] Durrel, Lawrence, *Key to Modern Poetry*, London, Peter Nevill, 1952, pp. 148–50.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[4] Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[5] Dante, *The New Life*, translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, iii.

[6] Ezekiel, 37:1.

[7] Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, translated by Henry Francis Cary, " Purgatory ", 24:53–4.

for Eliot's works of this " middle period " are largely centred about these three books, and they suggest the direction to which Eliot made his turn.

This poem, the expression of the " higher dream ",[1] begins with " the firm, light, dancing rhythms."[2] Punctuation marks are used more frequently than in part one, and they help to make the first long paragraph picturesque. Besides " auditory imagination," " visual imagination " is used here. Symbolic whiteness in such phrases as " white leopards ", " Lady in a white gown ", and " whiteness of bones " makes the impression of this picture very clear and bright.[3] The sense of joy in dissolution of self, the speaker's trust in the Lady as the intercessor to God, and the feeling of assurance thereof, are expressed by the frequent use of poli-syllabic words, such as, " Loveliness, meditation, oblivion, indigestible, contemplation, whiteness, and forgetfulness."

The middle of this second poem is the hymn to the Lady. Short sentences with measured cadence make a beautiful contrast with the preceding and the following stanzas. This juxtaposition of lyrical and prosaic (or free) verse is used in all the second poems of *Four Quartets*. In this lyric of *Ash Wednesday* each sentence has two strong beats, and trochaic meter is used mixed with the dactylic meter.

Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful
The single rose
Is now the garden
(II, ll. 28–32)

This rhythm which is based on the emphatic stress or beat is, I think, one form of " the new meter that has made possible his new freedom with the language of poetry."[4] According to Gardner, Eliot begins his new style with *The Hollow Men*, deserting the heroic line which he has

[1] Eliot, T. S., " Dante ", *Selected Essays*, London, Faber & Faber Ltd., 1951, p. 262.
[2] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
[3] I think these lines are an illustration of what Eliot calls the " music of imagery ".
[4] Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

been using with such a marvellous skill. One reason for this change is, she says, " that from now on he will try to speak in his own voice, which will express himself with all his limitations, and not to try to escape those limitations by imitating other poets."[1] The consummation of the new metre is that of *Four Quartets*. The norm of it is four-stress line with a long medial pause with which " Burnt Norton " begins.

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable.
>
> (" Burnt Norton ", I)

Also, the fact that this lyric part is much influenced by the litany of Vigin Mary in the Catholic Church cannot be disregarded. The following quotation is from the " Litany of the Blessed Virgin."

> Holy Mary,
> Holy Mother of God,
> Holy Virgin of virgins,
> Mother of Christ,
> Mother of divine grace
> Mother most pure,
> Mother most chaste . . .
> Seat of wisdom,
> Cause of our joy,
> Spritual vessel,
> Vessel of honor
> Singular vessel of devotion,
> Mystical rose, . . .

The last stanza begins with long sentences with fifteen to seventeen syllables, and with a pause in the middle. The dancing rhythm of the first stanza is resumed here; and to the close of the poem, sentences become shorter and shorter. Here are the last four sentences.

> . . .This is the land which ye
> Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.
(II, ll. 52–4)

The briskness of these lines displays the " note of absolute assurance and content."[1]

The movement of the third poem, the shortest of *Ash Wednesday*, is that of the ascent of the stair, an image of the spiritual progress.[2] The protagonist, having already passed the first stair, turns " at the first turning of the second stair," (III, l. 1) and looks back on his labour of the will. There is a feeling of exhaustion. The first stanza of six lines,

> At the first turning of the second stair
> I turned and saw below
> The same shape twisted on the banister
> Under the vapour in the fetid air
> Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
> The deceitful face of hope and despair.
> (III, ll. 1–6)

conveys this feeling wonderfully. These lines have many diphthongs and long vowels with no punctuation but the last full-stop. And they cause the slow, continuous and wavering progress of lines. Eliot uses this technique in *The Waste Land* several times.

> And I will show you something different from either
> Your shadow at morning striding behind you
> Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
> (" The Burial of the Dead ", ll. 27–9)
>
> To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
> With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
> (" The Burial of the Dead ", ll. 67–8)

However, the speaker makes up his mind, leaves the struggle of will, and goes up the second stair, though it is dark and damp and has something sinister around it. This decision is shown in the following line punctuated with a comma and a semi-colon:

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[1] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

[2] Cf. Dante, " Purgatory ", especially Canto IX.

I left them twisting, turning below;

(III, l. 8)

The first half of the third stanza, which expresses the trial of hope with its imagery of youth and spring, has again no punctuation.

> . . . a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit
> And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
> A broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
> Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
>
> (III, ll. 13–6)

These lines move smoothly and enchantingly with the repeated sounds of "l", "r", "m", "n", and "t"; and induce the will of the speaker with the healthy joy of sense. The speaker's mind becomes overwhelmed with its charm and the repetition of "l" and "r" sounds becomes more pressing:

> Brown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown.
> Lilac and brown hair;
>
> (III, ll. 17–8)

Thus the mind of "I" is distracted; but with "strength beyond hope and despair"[1] he climbs the third stair. The third stair itself, however, is not described in the poem. "The ascent of it is not achieved unaided and its climax is a movement of humility."[2] The broken phrase from the speech of the centurion in Matthew 8 is probably the expression of this climax of humility. Thus, the turning is now ended.

Part IV, treating the "higher dream" as its subject matter, is again very Dantesque. Its closest allusion is to the "earthly paradise" in Canto XXVIII of "Purgatory", where Matilda "went, / And culling flower from flower, wherewith her way / Was all over painted."[3] Also the Lady, in many ways Dantesque, appears as the centre of the poem. It is a bright and beautiful poem.

The poem opens with the iambic metre. Although it does not continue regularly, the rhythmical lines as

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[1] *Ash Wednesday*, III, l. 20.

[2] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[3] "Purgatory", XXVIII, ll. 41–3.

Here are the years that walk between. . . .
(l. 12)

The new years walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years . . .
(ll. 16–7)

The silent sister veiled in white and blue
(l. 22)

Redeem the time, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken . . .
(ll. 26–7)

are scattered all over the poem. Owing to them, the poem, as a whole, is melodiously beautiful. Another source of the beauty of this poem is its images: rather traditional poetic images—violet and yew, the images of life and death; fountain and spring, the rebirth symbols; flute and fiddle, the symbols of romantic love; together with the medieval image, "jewelled unicorn"—centering about the vision of graceful lady.[1] Moreover, it is full of symbolical colours such as "green" for hope, "violet" for penitence, "white" for purity and "blue" for celestial qualities, etc. These images, together with the beautiful phrase "bright cloud of tears" may be used for "beatitude" against which, according to Eliot, we have a prejudice as material for poetry.[2]

It is interesting to compare some passages of this poem with those of *The Waste Land*, which are similar in construction but different in their mood. One is the opening lines of *The Waste Land* which I have quoted already; let me quote it here again.

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tuber.

The other is from line 12 to 18 of this poem:

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[1] Cf. Jung, C. G., *Psychology and Alchemy*, translated by B.F.C. Hull, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952, Chapter 6, II "The Paradigm of the Unicorn".

[2] Eliot, T. S., "Dante", *Selected Essays*, p. 264.

Here are the years that walk between, bearing
Away the fiddles and flutes, restoring
One who moves in the time between sleep and waking, wearing

White light sheathed about her, folded.
The new years walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme.

Both of them have several lines with a pause near the end, and ending with a present participle. Yet the former has an exceedingly dull and monotonous rhythm[1] which suits its contents well. Whereas the latter is very bright and flexible, and also suggestive. This contrast is caused largely by the difference in the length of lines. That is, the seven lines of the passage from *The Waste Land* have almost the same number of syllables in them—the first, second and third lines, nine syllables; fifth and sixth lines eight. Moreover the commas with pauses, are set regularly after the stressed syllables,—month, land, desire, warm, snow—and before the disyllabic participles. On the other hand, the lines in the latter passage have from seven to fourteen syllables, which is rather irregular. Besides that, tri-syllabic present participle "restoring" is used together with disyllabic present participles "wearing" and "bearing." Bright sounds of the words, "light, flute, fiddle, restore," strengthen the effect mentioned above.

In this poem there is also a wonderful example of the complicated rhymes which surely strike the readers as "delicate and tentative music."[2]

. . . a bright cloud of *tears*, the *years*, restoring
With a new verse the ancient *rhyme*. *Redeem*
The *time*. *Redeem*
The unread vision in the higher *dream* . . .
(ll. 17–20)

The broken petition at the end of this poem is not only beautiful in itself but also suggests that the revelation is yet to come. So it stands

[1] Muraoka, I., "On *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot", *Studies in English Literature*, written in Japanese, Vol. XXIV, Nos. 3 & 4, pp. 129–153, October, 1954.

[2] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

hesitating, as if fearful, to complete itself.[1]

In Part V, the protagonist plunges into the discussion on the " word unheard, unspoken " referred to in Part IV.[2] This poem is the most impersonal of the six, which has no direct statement of the protagonist's experience or his petition. This fact may suggest that the protagonist has already attained a certain height and now he can look around more widely and can discuss a more general matter. Be that as it may, it has a varied rhythm which attracts the reader's attention. The first stanza begins with the rapid and circling rhythm. Its theme is the Word, as logos, which is " unheard, unspoken ", and yet is " within the world and for the world."[3] It seems as if Eliot put in his own words the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John, especially the verses 9 to 11 :

> That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

The passage of *Ash Wednesday* which I have been discussing is taken over by the liturgical expression of Christ's griefs, which is a quotation from Micah :

> O my people what have I done unto thee.
>
> (Micah, 6:3)

This line continues in Micah thus :

> . . . and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants ; . . .
>
> (Micah, 6:3–4)

The almost breathless circling movement, which signifies the agonizing effort and extreme strain of mind, is caused by the dizzy repetition of words. (Indeed, the word " word " is repeated nine times in the first stanza.) The sound of " w " and " l " in such words as " word, without, within, world, unstilled, still, whirled " emphasises this movement.

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[1] "After this our exile " comes from the prayer *Salve Regina*, and continues " show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

[2] *Ash Wednesday*, IV, l. 28.

[3] *Ibid.*, V, ll. 3–6.

In contrast with this whirling passage, the quotation from Micah, a sentence of nine mono-syllabic or disyllabic words, is very direct and straightforward.

In the second stanza the protagonist explores the whole world for the response to the Word, and to be sure, in vain. The same sentence patterns, the same words, or the same sounds are used oftener and oftener as doubts and self-questioning develop, the example of which is the following:

> No place of grace for those who avoid the face
> No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny the voice . . .
> (V, ll. 18–9)

In the third stanza where " the poet turns from surveying the world as a spectator to including himself in the number of those who, though they have responded, have not responded fully,"[1] the rhythm is more moderate than before. The tempo becomes slower and quieter to the close of the poem, where the protagonist, keenly realizing and repenting the sinfulness of human beings, asks the veiled sister to pray for them. The last stanza expresses the struggle of the will of those who " are terrified and cannot surrender."[2] It contains imagery of much interest, but let me now go on to the last poem of this series.

All critics point out the similarity between the sixth poem and the first poem. And indeed, the sixth is extremely similar in its construction and diction to the first. This means that the process of the series of poems is a circular or spiral movement, and now the poem arrives where it started and knows the place for the first time.[3] Therefore, although they are similar constructively, their effects are quite different. In short, the last poem is " positive " while the first one is " negative ". The concentration is, in the first poem, to renounce and not to hope,

> I renounce the blessed face
> And renounce the voice . . .
> (I, l. 21–2)

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[1] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[2] *Ash Wednesday*, V, l. 31.

[3] Cf. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, " Little Gidding ", V, " the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.

In consequence of the painful striving, there is a suffocating atmosphere as if he is confined in a narrow cell. On the contrary in the last poem, because the process is over, there are expressed "aspirations after natural vigor and unfettered movement."[1] The scene described in this poem is far more spacious than that of the first poem as "the wide window towards the granite shore"[2] suggests. This poem reads so smoothly and easily that we are inclined to think that it was composed in the way which Eliot speaks of in his essay on Pascal:

> A piece of writing meditated, apparently without progress, for months or years, may suddenly take shape and word; and in this state long passages may be produced which require little or no retouch.[3]

This may apply to the whole of *Ash Wednesday*, but, it seems to me, especially to this poem. These are sentences,

> . . . where every word is at home,
> Taking its place to support the others,
> The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
> An easy commerce of the old and the new . . .
> The complete consort dancing together.[4]

"An easy commerce of the old and the new" is achieved in the free use of the traditional prayer at the very closing of this poem: "Suffer me not to be separated," from the prayer *Anima Christi*, and "And let my cry come unto thee," from the suffrage of Catholic Church, which Duncan Jones calls "the most poignant lines"[5] of this poem.

The above analysis of the technique of *Ash Wednesday* may have given some idea of the beauty of this poem. It is not that formal and classical beauty of *The Waste Land* or of *Four Quartets*, but "haunting and disturbing beauty."[6] It is perhaps because "the man who suffers" and

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[1] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
[2] *Ash Wednesday*, VI, l. 8.
[3] Eliot, T. S., *Selected Essays*, p. 405.
[4] Eliot, T. S., *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding", V.
[5] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
[6] Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

" the mind which creates " are not wholly separate in the poet,[1] the material of the poem being too familiar with him. Thus, it does not belong to that " self-explanatory world of art," but has yet the " arbitrariness of the individual inner world."[2] This is the main cause of the obscurity of this poem, as well as of the suggestiveness and delicacy of its music. In Eliot's words the reason of the difficulty of this poem may be that there are " personal causes which make it impossible for a poet to express himself in any but an obscure way ; " and " while this may be regretable, we should be glad, I think, that the man has been able to express himself."[3] So in the next chapter, I will consider the problem, " what are his personal causes ? "

Chapter II *Ash Wednesday* as a Turning Point

It is a difficult task to answer the question, " What is poetry ? " Many critics and poets tried to answer it, and consequently, we have by now as many definitions as there are literary movements in the history of human civilization. Eliot also gives his own definition of poetry. He says in the preface to *The Sacred Wood*, that poetry is a superior amusement, and he calls it an amusement, " not because that is a true definition, but because if you call it anything else you are likely to call it something still more false."[4] So of course it is not enough to say that it is a " superior amusement." Yet " certainly poetry is not the inculcation of morals, or the direction of politics ; and no more is it religion or an equivalent of religion."[5] He gives also that famous definition that

> Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it is not

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[1] Eliot, T. S., *The Sacred Wood*, p. 54. Eliot says here, " . . . the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates ; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material."

[2] Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

[3] Eliot, T. S., *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 150.

[4] Eliot, T. S., *The Sacred Wood*, Preface to the 1928 edition, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1957, p. vii.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. ix.

the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.[1]

This definition became popular because it was strange, unique and original. However, I think we must also pay attention to the sentence which follows it,

> But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.[2]

To be sure, there must be some strong emotion in the very deep of Eliot's mind when he composes a poem. For, poetry cannot exist apart from emotion. Of course this does not mean that every poem is an expression of emotion. Anyway, this poetical emotion is working in the mind of any poet—and also in any man. It is the zeal for permanence or immortality which mortal humanity conceives. The Poet is a man who searches after the moment when eternity comes into history. For Eliot, such a moment is the moment in a " Rose garden ",[3] when the time and the timeless meet.

> Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
> And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
> And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
> The surface glittered out of heart of light,
> And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
>
> (*Four Quartets*, " Burnt Norton," I)

It is the moment when the deep-concealed reality comes into sight, illuminating and unifying the whole fragments of human life. By expressing such moments the poet transforms the situation of everyday life. In this point the function of poetry is very much akin to the function of magic. The poet does not give us anything different from our ordinary experiences, but he organizes the fragmentary, obscure and confused situations into a new whole. He shows us the horror, joy, and glory—the one reality of life—through the dispersed phenomena of " this twittering world."[4]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[2] *Loc. cit.*

[3] Eliot, T. S., *Four Quartets*.

[4] *Ibid.*, " Burnt Norton ", III.

> One of the greatest services of poetry lies in its power to make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feeling which forms the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate.[1]

Eliot's method was, to begin with the examination of what life is like. He looked around " using poetry to get closer to the shape of a real situation : not starting off with a preconceived notion of what the situation is, nor a simple fixed attitude towards it."[2] To look into the situation of the modern world, to penetrate into it deeply is a hard thing to do. For, it is so confused and complicated that no one can get the unifying order or the true harmony by just examining it. The remarkable development of psychology, especially of psycho-analysis, and the proposition of the theory of relativity by Einstein destroyed the conception of the mechanical and orderly world which moves harmoniously after strict causality. Besides, " under the terms of the new idea a precise knowledge of the outer world becomes an impossibility. This is because we and the outer world constitute a whole."[3] Moreover, the

> Beginning of this century saw not only destruction, human and material, unparalleled in recorded history, but the mind itself has revealed a capacity for evil of which it was previously unaware.[4]

So it becomes the task of a great genius to see this crisis and to express it either in imaginative terms or in scientific terms. Eliot is one of these geniuses who did not escape from the appalling disorder of modern civilization.

> Eliot, we realized, was the poet who had taken upon himself the burden of experiencing the world for his generation, as kings were formerly supposed to act and suffer for their tribes.[5]

It is this decision of not leaping to any easy, preconceived conclusion that makes the characters of Eliot's earlier poems " heroic." Of course

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[1] Matthiessen, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[2] Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

[3] Durrel, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[4] Evans, Ifor, *English Literature Between the Wars*, 2nd ed., London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1949, p. 1.

[5] Raine, Kathleen, " The Poet of our Time ", in *T. S. Eliot : A Symposium*, Richard March and Tambimuttu, eds., London, Editions Poetry, 1948, p. 79.

Prufrock, Gerontion and Sweeney are by no means " heroes " in a classical sense. For Mr. J. Alfred Prufrock is " an unromantic and unprincely Hamlet in a ' tragical-comical-historical ' urban drama where ' Denmark's a prison '—the prison of a divided self in the tortures of neurotic conflict."[1] Gerontion is a diminutive of Gerontius, a medieval saint. He is a little old man who " was neither at the hot gate / Nor fought in the warm rain / Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass, / Bitten by flies, fought."[2] Nor had he ever felt that serene joy and faith which Gerontius felt in acceptance of purgation.[3] And Apeneck Sweeney, " the vertebrate " who " laughs," " sprawls " and " gapes " is just an antithesis of the Greek hero, Agamemnon.[4] His life has no significance, and it is fragmentary, having lost the order and harmony. However, it is a paradox of Eliot or of the modern world, that in a sense only these people are heroic. Prufrock is great in his thoroughness to boredom, despondency and scepticism; Gerontion, in his study of his suffering and patience to sit and wait for rain; Sweeney, in his separation from any spiritual value, or human fellowship. For " Our only health is the disease . . . and . . . to be restored, our sickness must grow worse."[5] In the disorderly situation such as that of the contemporary world, to see things directly, and look at them as they really are, is in itself of great value. It was perhaps in this sense that Raine said " that the statement of terrible truth has a kind of healing power."[6] W. H. Auden also wrote in his poem dedicated to Eliot on his sixtieth birthday,

> . . . it was you
> Who, not speechless with shock but finding the right
> Language for thirst and fear, did most to
> Prevent a panic.[7]

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[1] Drew, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[2] Eliot, T. S., " Gerontion ", ll. 3–6.
[3] Drew, *op. cit.*, pp. 70 f.
[4] Cf. Eliot, T. S., " Sweeney among the Nightingales ".
[5] Eliot, T. S., *Four Quartets*, " East Coker ", IV.
[6] Raine, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
[7] Auden, W. H., " For T. S. Eliot ", in *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium.*, p. 43.

However, although it is in itself valuable to look at the outer world as it really is, it is still true that there is no escape from the horror of life and death. Moreover, all the detailed investigation of phenomena proves to be utterly meaningless unless complemented and completed by a spiritual need. Thus the mystic unity of the Grail myth[1] could not bring the hope for salvation, but only the ascetic moral teaching from Upanishad, " Give, Sympathize, Control." So Helen Gardner says that the atmosphere of this poem is darker at the end than in the beginning,[2] although it ends with a triumphal song " Shantih shantih shantih ". Order, harmony or vitality cannot be regained either through the power of myth or through the natural law—for nature itself is now " out of joint ".[3] Therefore the enunciation of a mood which is near to despair, which found its expression in the poem *The Hollow Men*, " has emerged not from any individual fretfulness, or distress, but from a recognition of the general disruption of civilization."[4]

> The poet of *The Waste Land* was too serious to continue the same complacence as some of his contemporaries inhabiting that godforsaken desert. It was certain he would not strike at that point, and one watched him to see what he would do.[5]

What did he do against this " disruption of civilization " and the mood of despair which follows it? In order to answer this question let me once more refer to *The Hollow Men* which is said to be more a beginning than a development,[6] though most of its images are derived from *The Waste Land*. This poem begins with a sentence, " We are the hollow men." It is rather a rare thing to hear this poet speak of " we." For his attitude towards the characters has been utter disdain; he never " represents them clearly, but wearily and with infinite contempt."[7] In *The Waste Land*, Eliot described the degenerated mass of citizens as follows:

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[1] Cf. Author's Notes on *The Waste Land*.

[2] Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

[3] Cf. *The Waste Land*, " Burial of the Dead ", ll. 1–7.

[4] Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[5] Wilson, Frank, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
(" The Burial of the Dead ", ll. 60–3)

Here, the protagonist is not included in the crowd. He stands aside and calls them; " You! . . . mon semblable,—mon frere." On the contrary the speaker of *The Hollow Men* does not separate himself from the people of " the dead land." However, because

Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar
(*The Hollow Men*, I)

the communication between them is impossible. Consequently, the narrator of *The Hollow Men* becomes " a man altogether by himself."[1]

This change seems to me very significant. For though it is very important, in the age of conflict, to see the phases of confusion as they really are, yet it is also true that so long as one remains as a mere spectator he can never take responsibility in the confusion; and that means he really is not living. The spectator, standing outside the civilization, criticizes and judges, pointing out the cause of disorder, the cause of despondency and gives lessons in regard to the ways of getting out of the degenerate state. But these are all he can do. And now that the poet reached the nadir of despair, he had to change his method in order to get out of it. So he turned in upon himself, " since only in his own progress towards his God could he hope to find profitable material for poetry."[2]

Ash Wednesday is a poem of confession and repentance. The protagonist, turning his eyes to the inside of himself, must have found there "Adam's curse " as the allusion to the Tree of Knowledge in the fifth

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[2] *Ibid.*, p 34.

poem[1] suggests. He regards it as the fundamental cause of the disorderly and confused state of our life, and the cause of its being the waste land. This puritanic conception of life and humanity must be Eliot's way of accepting responsibility. Acceptance of this faith belongs to the world of certain intimate and personal experience. So, while this process was going on, the poet narrowed his range of vision and withdrew into his own mind. Indeed, the transitional poems, "Journey of the Magi" and "The Song for Simeon" which express this painful experience, concentrate on the stories from the Bible. He expresses his private concern again and again in his poems, though in a very impersonal expression, quite disregarding the reproaches that he has taken refuge in Christianity.

This process is shown concisely in "Marina" the last poem of the *Ariel* series. The whole poem is based on Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Marina, the daughter of Pericles, who was once lost and found again, is a symbol for hope, and potentiality. It has an epigraph,

Quis hic locus, quae regio, quae mundi plaga?

It is from Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, the adaptation from *Herakles mainomenos* by Euripides. Literal translation of it is "What place is this? What region, what quarter of the world?" In this tragedy, Hercules returning triumphantly from his adventure to the subterranian world, rescues his wife and children from the hand of the enemy. However, Juno, the goddess of revenge, seizes and puts him under a spell of madness, so that he kills his family in a fit of frenzy. After the deed, he falls into a deep slumber, and when he awakens in his right mind, he utters the words quoted above. When he finds out that it was he who killed his own children and wife, he grieves greatly and tries to kill himself, but he is restrained by King Theseus.[2] This epigraph signifies indirectly the sensation of horror which Hercules felt when he realizes that he himself is responsible for the death of his wife and

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[1] *Ash Wednesday*, V, l. 35.

". . . spitting from the mouth the withered apple seed."

[2] Niizeki, R., *The History of Greek and Roman Drama*, written in Japanese, Vol. 6, Tokyo, Tokyodo, 1957, pp. 535 ff.

children; and this sensation refers to the horror of a man who discovers human evil in himself and realizes that he is responsible for the present waste land.

This sensation of horror is mixed with the serene joy of rebirth, or at least the hope for rebirth as the symbolical image of the Shakespearean daughter suggests. And this hope is associated with " sea-images ".

> What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands
> What water lapping the bow
> And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog . . .
> (" Marina ", ll. 1–3)

These are likely to be the seas and shores of the New England coast, where Eliot spent his younger days. The similar imagery is also used in the sixth poem of *Ash Wednesday* where the religious conflict of the protagonist is over.

> And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
> In the lost lilac and lost sea voices
> And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
> For the bent golden rod and the lost sea smell
> Quickens to recover
> The cry of quail and the whirling plover
> And the blind eye creates
> The empty forms between the ivory gates
> And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth.
> (VI, ll. 11–9)

We can trace the effect of Puritanism in these images as Maxwell says:

> The fact that Eliot should instinctively make use of this [New England's] imagery at all is an indication that the influences of his New England upbringing have not been entirely conquered. . . . Subconsciously, the imagery reveals the Puritan sentiment that pervades his Anglicanism.[1]

In this manner, the process of regeneration is now completed. The poet has already passed the point where " descent " becomes " ascent " or " the way down " becomes " the way up ", and he is now in Purgatory or in Earth's paradise, having deeply experienced the world of Hell.

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[1] Maxwell, D.E.S., *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952, p. 146.

Such a change of attitude can never occur without affecting the technique of the poems. The transition from the dramatic poem to the lyrical poem, which I have discussed in the preceding chapter is one manifestation of it, but now let me discuss this change in the technique of poetry from another point of view; that is, the quality and use of the imagery.

The main difference between the imagery of *The Waste Land* and other earlier poems, and that of *Ash Wednesday* is that one is a realistic picture derived from observation and the other is a vision in the poet's dream. The method of *The Waste Land* is very similar to that of the movie, as I referred to in the preceding chapter. In this poem the eye of the protagonist[1] reflects all the fragments of our culture, art, religion and mythology; and showing one shot after another, the poet displays the barrenness of the present state of our civilization. He insists that owing to the lack of positive belief, our existence is uprooted—that we really *are* not, though we are here breathing, eating, walking, reading and chattering—and since people have no faith they have lost their meaning for existence. However, he never asserts his opinion directly, for he is always a poet and not a controversialist. He appeals his assertion by the method of poetry—and in this case his method is that of visual transition. So every sequence in *The Waste Land* has acute and metallic accuracy. Needless to say, it does not mean that the description of *The Waste Land* is realistic or naturalistic in the simple sense.

> Eliot's observations are not primarily of physical objects; his most sustained analysis is applied to states of mind and emotion.[2]

For example look at the description of a neurotic society-woman in the first half of "A Game of Chess," or the episode of " Lil's husband " in the latter half of the same poem; and compare it with the visionary picture of the Lady sitting under a juniper tree in Part II, or the silent sister between the yews in the fourth poem. The snatches of conversation from line 111 of "A Game of Chess " contrasted to the stately begin-

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[1] Notes on *The Waste Land.* The poet says here, that Tiresias, a mere spectator is the most important character of the poem; and that what Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem.

[2] Matthiessen, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

ning is itself a very precise picture of the terrible emotional barrenness. Likewise, the sloppy conversation in cockney presents to us a scene of a nasty pub where these women are chattering. The following are other such pictures from the earlier poems:

> I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
> And watched the smoke rises from the pipes
> Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?
> (" The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock ", ll. 70–2)
>
> Sitting along the bed's edge, where
> You curled the papers from your hair,
> Or clasped the yellow soles of feet
> In the palms of both soiled hands . . .
> (" Preludes ", III, ll. 12–5)
>
> . . . by Mr. Silvero
> With caressing hands, at Limoges
> Who walked all night in the next room;
> (" Gerontion ", ll. 23–6)

In these passages the poet is indeed " as close to the contemporary world as any novelist could be."[1] These pictures are real; so real as to make us start. Whereas the description of the silent sister,

> The silent sister veiled in white and blue
> Between the yews, behind the garden god,
> Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed but spoke no word.
> (IV, ll. 22–4)

is precise in detail—indeed, the poet gives no information about the color of the shirts of the lonely man in " Prufrock ", or the color of the hair of the woman in " Preludes ", nor does he give any outward description of Mr. Silvero and Mr. Hakagawa,—yet the picture itself is absolutely visionary. It has achieved a paradoxical " precision-in-vagueness " or " vagueness-in-precision."

For another example, let me compare the uses of two animals in *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday*. They are a rat in " The Fire Sermon " and three white leopards in Part II. In " The Fire Sermon " the protagonist is " fishing in the dull canal on a winter evening round behind

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[1] Leavis, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

the gashouse,"[1] where the river bears no testimony of summer nights and " the wind crosses the brown land, unheard,"[2] then,

> A rat crept softly through the vegetation
> Dragging its slimy belly on the bank.
>
> (ll. 15–6)

Here is a realistic picture of a rat creeping slowly among the withered grass, perhaps in search of food. We feel as if we are actually looking at it. It is an animal most suitable for the desolate and dreary scene of the waste land in winter. On the other hand, the three white leopards which " sat under a juniper tree / In the cool of the day,"[3] have quite another effect. I think they are more like the visionary beasts in The Revelation of St. John, (for example white, red, black and pale horses in Chapter 6,) than any actual beasts. Some critics regard these leopards as the symbols of the world, the flesh and the devil, after the three enemies of the Soul in *The Dark Night* by St. John of the Cross. The relation between them and the leopard in the Hell of Dante is also pointed out. However, Duncan Jones rejects the idea of three evils, and says that the three white leopards are agents of good.[4] It is true that to these leopards is attributed the destructive power; but, so long as " destruction " is the only way for rebirth, I think his interpretation, which regards them as symbolizing the goodness of the Lady, her loveliness, and the fact that she honours the Virgin in meditation, is more proper. Anyway, the three figures of the leopards bear much symbolical meaning.

This transition from observation to dream brings several other changes in train. One of them is the narrowing of the range of materials and images. In earlier poems Eliot took everything available in human life as the material of his poetry, quite disregarding such idea as " poetic diction."

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[1] *The Waste Land*, " The Fire Sermon ", ll. 189 f.

[2] *Ibid.*, ll. 172 f.

[3] *Ash Wednesday*, II, ll. 1 f.

[4] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

> The cannons of the poetical are forgotten; the poet assumes the right to make use of any materials that seem to him significant.[1]

And thus we have quite " unpoetical " diction: a patient etherised upon a table, saw dust restaurants with oyster shells, toast and marmalade, drain and gutter, bear, parrot, ape and hippopotamus. These images, together with such " traditional poetic images " as Prelude of Chopin, sounds of violin and remote cornets, lilacs and hyacinths, move almost dizzily; and

> We have here poetry that expresses freely a modern sensibility, the ways of feeling, the mode of experience, of one fully alive in his own age.[2]

On the contrary, in *Ash Wednesday*, there scarcely remain such urban images, and instead, the traditional and beautiful images become dominant. For the garden, which springs and fountain made cool; and such symbolical flowers as rose, lilac and hawthorne are the important images of this poem. The lady, the central figure, is also both beautiful and traditional. It is traditional in a sense that the contra-sexual component, Anima, is alive in every man. It is an archetypal image, which is at first impetuous and impulsive and then become " a symbol of hidden wisdom, ' the enlightener ', the mediating function between the conscious ego and the inner world of the unconscious."[3] Needless to say, this image in *Ash Wednesday* comes mainly of Dante's Beatrice, who first attracted Dante in her living self, and after her death, appeared in his vision and guided him in his pilgrimage described in *The Divine Comedy*. It is also famous that in the last Cantos of *The Divine Comedy*, the admiration of Beatrice is hieghtened to the praise of the Virgin Mary. Eliot's lady who is described as " the blessed face," or " Lady in white gown sitting under a juniper tree," is also related to Mary, as anonymous invocations such as " Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death," "And after this our exile " and "And let my cry come unto Thee " suggest. The main interest in these images is,

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[1] Leavis, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[2] *Loc. cit.*

[3] Drew, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

however, not in themselves but in the way Eliot makes use of them in his " modern " sensibility. In this regard Duncan Jones says as follows :

> The language of the poems achieves that ' easy commerce of the old and new ' which is spoken of in " Little Gidding." In the fourth poem, for instance, between two lines which might almost be translations of Dante, there is a line which could only be modern :
>
> Going in white and blue, in Mary's color,
> Talking of trivial things
> In ignorance and knowledge of eternal dolour
>
> An element of contrast is intended : but it is not sharp : there is congruity too. The images which are traditional—the desert, the bones, the rose, the unicorn, combine in the same ' easy commerce ' with the white sails, the ' lilac and brown hair ', the bent golden rod, the wind in the yew trees : there is no disharmony between the aged eagle, which is traditional, and the aged shark, which is an invented symbol.[1]

Another characteristic of the imagery of *Ash Wednesday* is that many of them are connected, in some way or another, to the revived Nature. In *Ash Wednesday*, April is no longer " the cruellest month " nor is May " depraved."[2] Instead of the desert " where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water,"[3] here is a garden where " the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down."[4] The images of the sea to which I have referred already, and the invocation to the lady as " spirit of the river, spirit of the sea," in the sixth poem are other examples of it. The protagonist's idea of life, " this brief transit where the three dreams cross, / The dream crossed twilight "[5] is not so different from such an idea as " life, what *cauchemar !* " of " Portrait of a Lady." However, in *Ash Wednesday* the protagonist has, at least, a vision of the paradise which is the promise for the salvation of human being. It is significant that the hope for salvation is expressed not without the images derived from nature.

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[1] Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

[2] " Gerontion ", st. 3.

[3] *The Waste Land*, " The Burial of the Dead ", ll. 22–4.

[4] *Ash Wednesday*, IV, l. 25.

[5] *Ibid.*, VI, ll. 5 f.

In accordance with the narrowing of the range of diction and imagery, it is also noticeable that the range of the literary sources of the poem become narrow. As we have seen already there are many literary allusions in *Ash Wednesday*, but they mostly focus on Dante and Scripture. Some exceptions are the translation from Cavalcanti and the parody of a line from Shakespeare's sonnet.[1] Other images mostly belong to the Dantesque or Biblical world. Besides those images which I have already explained, there are several other phrases which are derived obviously from these two books. For instance, " the bones " and " the Voice of God " in the second poem are from Ezekiel 37, " the fruit of the gourd " (II, l. 13) is referred to Jonah 4:6, " the burden of the grass-hopper " (II, l. 24) to Ecclesiastes 12:5, " the single rose " (II, l. 32) to " Paradise " 33:7–9, " the land which ye shall divide by lot " (II, ll. 52 f.) to Ezekiel 48:29, " old man " (III, l. 10) to Romans 6:6, Ephesians 4:22, and Colossians 3:9, and " Redeem the time " (IV, ll. 19–20) Ephesians 5:6 and Colossians 4:5. Moreover, it can be said that the whole poem is based on the Psalm 51, the very beautiful song of penitence and praise.

On the other hand, in earlier poems, Eliot borrows (or " steals ") a great number of phrases from various literary compositions of Europe. By just examining the epigraphs of his poems we can enumerate many authors from ancient Greece to Modern England : Aeschylus (" Sweeney Among the Nightingales "), Petronius (*The Waste Land*), Virgil (" *La Figlia Che Piange* "), St. Augustine (" Burbank with a Beddeker, Bleistein with a Cigar "), Francois Villon ("A Cooking Egg "), Christopher Marlowe (" Portrait of a Lady "), Shakespeare (" Gerontion "), Beaumont and Fletcher (" Sweeney Erect "), Browning, Henry James (" Burbank "), and Joseph Conrad (*The Hollow Men*).

In short, the change of direction in Eliot's poems is from " objective " attitude to " subjective " attitude. The contrast between the dramatic poem which analyses and criticizes the " immense phenomena of futili-

[1] " Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope " (I, l. 4) is from " Desiring this man's art and that man's scope " (Sonnet, XXIX, l. 7).

ty,"[1] with the method of observation, and the lyrical poem which expresses the personal experience with the method of vision will prove this proposition. The poet has now found " some secret of totality of being " or " some pattern of relationship which bring man and men together."[2] He has found " the still point of the turning world, / Where past and future are gathered," and where we get

> The inner freedom from the practical desire,
> The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
> And outer compulsion, yet surrounded
> By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving. . . .[3]

However, here lies another problem,—the problem of " communication ". For to communicate the meaning which he has found is quite another thing from finding it. And although the poet is bound to be obscure in the process of finding and establishing " that central calm, a point from which he may begin to work outward again, . . . for he is talking, in such times, to himself and his friends—to that tiny, temporarily isolated unit with which communication is possible, with whom he can take a certain number of things for granted "[4] yet, all the same, he cannot escape from the reproach of being ambiguous and esoteric. For instance, Gardner says, that it is doubtful whether the sacred passages of *Ash Wednesday* do their proper function; that they may be, to those who are not used to prayer or worship, just conventional religious jargon.[5] Eliot himself must have noticed this fact, for in *Four Quartets* which treats religious experience for its central theme, he seldom uses theological terms or religious phraseology. Indeed " in *Four Quartets* one is aware of a perpetual effort towards communication, a desire to speak plainly."[6] His trial of the poetic drama may be another effort towards communication.

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[1] Drew, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 241.

[3] *Four Quartets*, " Burnt Norton ", II.

[4] Lewis, C. Day, *A Hope for Poetry*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1945, p. 37.

[5] Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

> The ideal medium for poetry, to my mind, and the most direct means of social 'usefulness for poetry,' is the theatre.[1]
>
> Every poet would like, I fancy, to be able to think that he had some direct social unity . . . He would like to be something of a popular entertainer, and be able to think his own thoughts behind a tragic or comic mask. He would like to convey the pleasures of poetry, not only to a larger audience, but to larger groups of people collectively; and the theatre is the best place in which to do it.[2]

And in fact, after 1935, he concentrates on the composition of poetic dramas: *Murder in the Cathedral* in 1935, *The Family Reunion* in 1939, *The Cocktail Party* in 1950, *The Confidential Clerk* in 1953, and his latest drama is said to be performed in Edinburgh this year. However, I cannot here discuss how he solved the problem of communication, for it will require much research on these dramas. Yet, I think it can safely be said that his career has been a continual progress, and if the great man is indeed a person "who has the assumption and upholding of one of the spiritual modes of being that are possible to mankind,"[3] Eliot is such a man.

Conclusion

There are many things that can be discussed in connection with T. S. Eliot. What I have discussed in this paper is only a very small part of the world of Eliot, and there is a very vast field with various problems left at all untouched. However, in studying *Ash Wednesday* as a turning point, and at the same time, the connecting link of *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* I have been trying to make clear the pattern of his progress and tried to approach the real meaning of his poetry.

All the poems of Eliot focus on the problem of truth or meaning, which can interpret the complicated and disorderly experiences. As he could not find any vital source for life or any positive truth in modern urban society in which he lived, the mood of his earlier poems is "boredom", and their theme is rejection of such fragmentary situation. He

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[1] Eliot, T. S., *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 153.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[3] Raine, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

makes a caricature of the squalid degeneration of the present age. The juxtaposition of heroic past and seedy present, which is dominant in *Poems* 1920, is often misunderstood as the praises of the great past days. However, the meaning of these poems is I think more profound:

> The central purpose (of these poems) is to emphasize the meanness of human activity, in whatever age and however pompous, when set against the mystery of death.[1]

The poet realizes keenly the fact that there is no escape from the horror of life. Describing the meaninglessness of living in the modern world, or the meaninglessness of human existence itself, the poet finds something more intense behind "boredom." The satire and cynicism become sharper, sometimes even vicious. What is expressed in these poems is the "horror" of human life. In *The Waste Land* the "indictment" becomes most extensive and public. The characters which seemed so far the mere "isolated specimens of moral degeneration" are now regarded as the typical example.[2] The consciousness of abyss is deepened to the utmost.

> *The Waste Land* is not only the consummation of Eliot's early verse teachnique, but the summing up, in its most significant form, of his attitude to the world he rejects.[3]

The poet of *The Waste Land* is great, in the sense that he did not escape from reality. However, the poet can no longer criticize or satirize the futility of contemporary life from which he has been divorced, *The Waste Land* being too comprehensive an indictment. So he plunges into "the heart of darkness", and despair itself becomes the theme of poetry. Thus he even sees the way the world ends.[4] He "descends lower," into the internal darkness, and says to his soul, "be still, and let the dark come upon you / Which shall be the darkness of God."[5] He invokes his lady to teach him to sit still, so that "the darkness shall

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[1] Wilson, Frank, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[4] *The Hollow Men*, V.
[5] *Four Quartets*, "East Coker," III.

be the light and the stillness the dancing."[1] Paradoxically, to concentrate on the problem of his own is the way to transcend his ego.

> In order to arrive at what you do not know
> You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
> In order to possess what you do not possess
> You must go by the way of dispossession.[2]

Thus in *Ash Wednesday* the transformation becomes complete. Only by narrowing the range of vision and withdrawing into his own mind and pondering over certain intimate personal experience, can he express the hope for salvation, or the glory of the human being; and only through the way which is esoteric and private could his poetry achieve the 'classical' and impersonal, and at the same time the original, verse form of *Four Quartets*.

I do not mean at all that the later poems are "better" or "more valuable" than the earlier poems. It is quite a different question. My purpose is just to point out the coherent development in Eliot's poetry. The fact that we can trace this development in the technique of his poetry makes us realize that "in his poetry he is neither a prophet nor a visionary primarily, but a poet, a great 'maker'."[3]

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[1] *Loc. cit.*

[2] *Loc. cit.*

[3] Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

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